This chapter briefly reviews and analyzes the key contributions on organized violence within historical sociology. It explores both the macro- and micro-level studies that have influenced recent debates within the field. The first section looks at war and warfare, the second section analyzes the clandestine political violence, the third section explores the revolutions, and the final section engages with the scholarship on genocides.

**Keywords** (separated by “-“)  
Organized violence - War - Revolution - Genocide - Clandestine political violence
Organized Violence and Historical Sociology

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Abstract

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Keywords

Organized violence · War · Revolution · Genocide · Clandestine political violence

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Introduction

There is no doubt that organized violence has shaped much of human history. Wars, revolutions, genocides, uprisings, rebellions, riots, clandestine political violence, and many other forms of organized violent action have been the defining drivers of social change and have ultimately created the contemporary world. Wars have played a decisive role in transforming empires and patrimonial kingdoms into nation-states (Wimmer 2013), revolutions have inaugurated variety of modern social orders and have contributed to the development of democracy (Lawson 2019, Moore 1966), and genocides have impacted on the global institutionalization and standardization of human right regimes (David 2020), while the proliferation of the clandestine political violence has transformed security systems and has increased coercive capacities of modern states (Mann 2013).

However, much of the comparative historical sociology has focused on other themes, and organized violence has only recently become a prominent research topic within this field. The conventional and the dominant understanding was that these topics stand outside of sociology’s scope and that they should be regarded as the legitimate research domain of other academic disciplines such as political science, security studies, or military history. The pervasive methodological nationalism combined with “the retreat of sociologists into the present” (Elias 1987) tended to obscure the centrality of organized violence in history.

Some of this reluctance to focus on organized violence was also a direct legacy of the post-WWII era as many sociologists working in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s felt uncomfortable to revisit the unprecedented bloodshed and devastation caused by the revolutions, rebellions, genocides, and two total wars of the early twentieth century (Malešević 2010a:17–18). Hence, it was only from the 1980s that historical sociologists have started producing influential theoretical analyses and comprehensive empirical studies on organized violence.

This is not to say that the classics of sociology completely ignored violence. On the contrary, both Marx and Weber have discussed nineteenth- and early twentieth-century revolutions, while early historical sociologists such as Otto Hintze, Gustav Ratzenhofer, Franz Oppenheimer, and Lester Ward produced valuable sociological analyses of war (Malešević 2010b). Norbert Elias has also explored the historical dynamics of organized violence in Europe in On the Process of Civilisation (1939), but the two volumes of this book were not widely circulated and became available in English only in 1969 and 1982, respectively (Mennell 1998).

Nevertheless, these classical contributions had little impact until well into the 1980s and 1990s when a number of historical sociologists have started revisiting their ideas and have developed new approaches to the study of organized violence. The initial focus was on the state formation and the role revolutions and warfare have played in the transformation of social orders, while the more recent scholarship has also zoomed in on the genocides and the clandestine political violence. In the last few decades, organized violence has become a significant research topic within the comparative historical sociology, and historical sociologists have produced a plethora of comprehensive comparative and theoretical studies. In many respects, the
contemporary historical sociology is a vibrant and expanding research field that is characterized by prolific and innovative output.

This chapter briefly reviews and analyzes the key contributions on organized violence within historical sociology. It explores both the macro- and micro-level studies that have influenced recent debates within the field. The first section looks at war and warfare, the second section analyzes the clandestine political violence, the third section explores the revolutions, and the final section engages with the scholarship on genocides.

War

War, defined as sustained organized violence between political units, has long been neglected as an object of study in sociology (Joas and Knöbl 2012). Neo-Weberian historical sociologists have however done much in the 1980s to rehabilitate it as a legitimate object of study, often in a constructive dialogue with Marxism.

In the 1970s, Perry Anderson contributed to a loosening of the Marxist postulate of the economic determination of political superstructure (1974). He argued that the European absolutist state was both the expression of the aristocracy’s class interests and the consequence of increased geopolitical struggles. It hence had a “relative autonomy.” Pursuing on this idea, historical sociologists inspired by Weber such as Tilly (1985), Mann (1986), or Giddens (1985) analyzed war as a trigger, catalyst, and symptom of large-scale social and political transformations. Without underplaying the role of economic factors, they insisted on the autonomous role of political structures and power struggles. Most of this literature considers war in the context of the advent of national states in Europe. War is accordingly seen to have shaped, and as having been shaped, by the rise of the modern state.

The idea of a close relation between war-making and state-making has been a recurring leitmotiv since the seminal work of Weber (1978), Hintze (1975), and Elias (2012). It is true that the defining elements of modern wars, the pitched battles between well-drilled battle formations, military discipline in the face of mass onslaught, have been pushed to their paroxysm by the advent of bureaucratic states extracting increasing resources from their national (and sometimes colonial) economies.

How have national states crystallized out of the context of war-making? By giving a structural advantage to polities with the most financial and coercive resources, territorial wars have from the end of the renaissance onward pushed toward the fiscal and military monopolies defining the territorial state. In the process, alternative forms of political organization have been eliminated: the decentralized authorities of feudalism, city-states, composite states, etc. Many entities that had significantly contributed to the modernization of warfare in the gunpowder age, such as the Duchy of Burgundy and the Kingdom of Piedmont, have also swept away in the process.

The relation between war-making and state-making is however not a linear or even a purely circular one. It is here more useful to think in terms of contingency.
Indeed, some of the features one associates with modern interstate wars, such as well-drilled infantry units, existed long before, including outside of Europe. It must however be noted that the periods seeing significant developments in infantry drills were all characterized by high levels of political organization. The well-drilled Roman legions disappeared with the end of the Roman Empire. Inversely, the return of complex infantry drills in the wars of religion of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is linked to the advent of bureaucratic states. In the same way, as highlighted by T. Andrade (2016), the very early appearance of military drill in China during the “Warring States Period” (475–221 BC), and its development under the Tang, Song, Ming, and Qin dynasties, is inseparable from the bureaucratized nature of these Chinese empires.

Why then has the modern state emerged in Europe and not elsewhere? The answer cannot be straightforward. The dispersal of military power characteristic of feudalism has played a role by creating a structural competition between multiple power centers. As highlighted by D. Nexon (2009), religious Reformation and Counter-Reformation also played its part by undermining the composite monarchies of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Historian G. Parker (1996) has shown that a set of autonomous technological and military innovations also played a crucial role: the invention and improvement of canons able to break down the forts of feudal lords, the emergence of powerful broadside ships, the bastion fortifications of the late renaissance, etc. The increasing costs of these military technologies tilted the advantage toward the polities most able to afford them: the highly extractive national states. The invention of the industrial revolutions further accentuated this tendency, ultimately leading into the century of total wars and totalitarian regimes.

The history of early modern war-making is however not one of the state centralizations alone. As highlighted by Elias (2012), it is also one of the “domestic pacifications” and of the “socializations of the monopoly”: the first refers to the fact that as states monopolize violence, interpersonal violence is increasingly repressed domestically; the second describes the situation in which monarchs needed to negotiate with ever wider societal sectors to access the resources required for war without triggering uprisings. As highlighted by S. Tarrow (2015), the advent of parliamentarism and the political inclusion of the bourgeoisie are hence tightly linked to the history of warfare. Sometimes, the requirements of these compromises led to the overturn rather than the reform of states. This can also be observed outside of Europe. The Meiji revolution in Japan in 1868 largely accounts for the military efficiency of the Japanese state in comparison to the Qin dynasty’s China toward the end of the nineteenth century: while the Japanese emperor freed himself from his dependency on the traditional warring class to modernize his military, China remained bogged down in its dependency on “warlords” resisting military modernization (Andrade 2016).

What about the role of war in the shaping of the international order? In sociology, it is mostly the Marxian and Braudelian inspiration that, through Wallerstein’s world systems theory (2004), further developed by Chase-Dunn (1999), has focused on the global implications of hegemonic wars. The latter are struggles between states at the
core of the “world system.” The outcome of these wars purportedly redrew the asymmetric relations between core and periphery in the world economy. Wallerstein hence sees three world systemic hegemonies: the Dutch (1625–1672), British (1815–1873), and American (1945–1965). Each one has been marked by 30-year-long hegemonic wars: the Thirty Years’ War leading to the Treaties of Westphalia, the French revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars leading to the Concert of Europe, and WWI and WWII leading to the creation of the UN.

Where does this leave the historical sociology of war today? Does its state-centricity not question its relevance in a world in which non-state actors, “failed states,” and transnational networks are often said to have fundamentally transformed the nature of war?

State-centricity does not necessarily imply an exclusive focus on interstate wars. Civil wars are not necessarily less state-centric. Indeed, on the one hand, they often can be analyzed as elimination struggles, multiple actors trying to reconstitute a monopoly over legitimate violence. On the other hand, the armed organizations emerging from the collapse of state authorities often build and expand on the organizational infrastructure of former state bureaucracies (Malešević 2017). Just as the dispersed struggles of feudalism set the stage for the modern state in Europe, such civil wars might set the stage for an increasingly bureaucratized post-conflict state as highlighted by post-genocide Rwanda. In other cases, such as in Chad, the successive civil wars revolve around the distribution of official positions inside the state (Debos 2016).

It is however true that the focus on the link between war-making and state-making has prevented historical sociologists from exploring alternative relations between war and social organizations. Anthropologists such as P. Clastres have, for example, shown that in Guayaki Guarani and Yanomami societies in South America, warfare participates actively in the reproduction of stateless societies adverse to differentiated power structures (1989). E.E. Evans-Pritchard shows a similar function of warfare in traditional Nuer society in Sudan (1987): in such segmentary societies, war prevents one segment from becoming more powerful than all others combined, thus precluding the advent of a proto-state.

State-centricism has however not prevented historical sociologists from doing a good job in highlighting the role of non-state actors in the early modern European wars. This is highlighted by the work of J. Thompson (1994; see also Olsson, 2016) on mercenaries and pirates and of D. Nexon (2009) on transnational religious dynamics.

Finally, by analyzing war in colonial, multinational, or transnational settings, historical sociologists are increasingly moving away from the state-centricity and Eurocentricity of early works (Barkawi 2017). In fact, the transnational circulation of military power is what has led authors like M. Mann to distinguish military and political sources of power. Mann sees political power as essentially territorial and centralized, while military power often defies the territorial borders of (pristine) states (1986). As highlighted by M. Shaw, military power asymmetries lead to the creation of “international ‘conglomerates’ of state power” such as NATO (Shaw 2002:89). T. Barkawi has shown that wars are often moments of accelerated
globalization (2006). He further shows that the multinationality of imperial armies hardly was an obstacle to military cohesion (2017).

Although historical sociology tends to privilege the macro-sociological level, there is a prolific literature in sociology on the micro-dynamics of war. As interstate wars become increasingly lethal, what motivates soldiers to fight? Traditionally, in mass charges, collective arousal is believed to play an important role. With the advent of automatic weapons, such mass charges however constitute easy targets. To respond to this challenge, dispersed and technically more demanding infantry tactics have been developed in the beginning of the twentieth century (King 2013). The latter however highlight the difficulty of maintaining combat motivation in the absence of peer pressure: soldiers tend to cower in fear, panic, or flee in the face of the mass slaughter of industrial war (Collins 2008). The use of group-operated weapons and long-distance killing does not allow overcoming this problem. The question of why soldiers fight has hence gained in saliency throughout the twentieth century.

Some authors have in this regard highlighted the role of coercion and military discipline: soldiers fight because they otherwise face disciplinary or penal measures. These explanations are however insufficient at best: soldiers often show great creativity in collectively circumventing disciplinary rules; if the alternative is a gruesome death, why would they fear punishment? More sociological approaches have insisted on the role of micro-solidarity within small units (Malesevic 2017). According to this strand of research, large-scale military organizations are abstract and impersonal and therefore unable to directly motivate soldiers to fight and die. They only do so by mobilizing primary group associations, networks of solidarity based on face-to-face interactions between soldiers (Shils and Janowitz 1948).

Another strand of research highlights the role of ideologies imbuing soldiers with a sense of social superiority. This sense compels them to fight to avoid the shame of desertion or defeat. The importance of norms of masculinity and racist ideologies is here of particular interest (Goldstein 2003; Bartov 2001).

Situational emotional dynamics also play an important role. R. Collins has highlighted the extent to which the activity of killing runs counter to the emotional flows of normal social interactions (2008). In situations of armed conflict, the human aversion to killing becomes a grandiose obstacle. In the confrontation between military units, the tension and fear of confrontation build up on both sides. Competent action becomes extremely difficult as a result. If however one of the sides crumbles, a sudden release of the accumulated tension on the opposing side is likely to lead to “forward panics,” sudden mass charges, or unilateral killing sprees. Even in these instances, it is typically only a minority of individuals who use force competently.

A. King has highlighted that in professional armies, the value of professionalism and compliance to professional norms explains much of the competent action of soldiers on the battlefield (2013). King also highlights the extent to which military drills allow conditioning military behavior. Over time, it builds confidence in the collectively performed moves, thus maintaining competent action in spite of “tension/fear.”
With the development of modern means of transport, military marches have largely become a ceremonial practice. Why are close-order marching drills then still performed in most armies? T. Barkawi highlights the role of parade ground marching and other military rituals in creating an embodied sense of belonging that favors cohesion in combat (2017). Drawing on Durkheim’s work on religion, he highlights how collectively performed rituals create a sense of transcendence, community, and collective meaning in spite of social and cultural differences. Barkawi highlights that although military casualties often are analyzed as a demotivating factor in military units, it at the same time functions like a sacrificial rite galvanizing soldiers to continue fighting until the bitter end.

Clandestine Political Violence

What in the news has become an obvious word, terrorism, is a contested concept in historical sociology. As highlighted by Charles Tilly among others, the category conflates distinct phenomena, and its pejorative connotation makes it part of the very conflict from which it springs. For Tilly, the use of disruptive forms of asymmetrical violence is common to different types of actors, and most of these combine different repertoires of action. To characterize a whole organization as terrorist would accordingly not make much sense (Tilly 2004; Bigo 2005; Porta 2013).

Even among those endorsing the concept, there is no consensus on definitions. Among the disagreements, one can mention whether its use shall be restricted to non-state armed groups or can include states, if it can be considered independently from armed conflict or revolutionary processes, whether it by definition targets civilians or if attacks against military targets also can qualify, if it necessarily is indiscriminate or can also target specific civilians.

The term originates in the rule of “terror” (terreur) of the French revolutionary government in 1793–1794. It was first systematically used in the nineteenth century to refer to revolutionary anarchists. Some authors like David C. Rapoport have used it to study a much more distant past, seeing the Ismaili Hashashin (Assassin) order of the medieval Levant, the Jewish Zealot-Sicarii under the Roman Empire, or the Hindu “Thugs” under the British Raj as the forebears of “religious terrorism” (Rapoport 1984). Such analyses are however often a-sociological. In the case of the “Thugs,” they also take the colonial discourse at face value, as most historical sources serve to justify the British Empire. The parallels drawn (long before the advent of “Jihadi terrorism”) between contemporary “terrorists” and past millenarist groups are however interesting from a narrative point of view. They highlight that the rhetoric of many modern groups, irrespective of ideological persuasions, draws on a common religious trope: the destruction of the current corrupt world announces the birth of a new and better one. Narrative parallels alone are however insufficient to identify a historically coherent set of practices.

The elements that are the most systematically used to define terrorism are the intentional killing of civilians to instigate fear and the indirect and disruptive use of violence against “soft targets” to reach political goals. These are however relatively
frequent features of warfare as highlighted by commerce raiding, strategic bombing, or the use of nuclear weapons. For this reason, clandestine political violence and clandestine armed groups are concepts preferred to “terrorism” and “terrorists.” These descriptions are indeed more precise and less normatively charged (Porta 2013).

This precision however implies that when referring to clandestine armed groups, major parts of the history of Hezbollah, Hamas, or the Taliban must be disregarded. These groups are indeed not clandestine in their heartlands. They rather take on para-statal characteristics linked to the modern state capacities that are brought to bear against them. Although they all three have used clandestine political violence outside of this heartland, they also have engaged in warfare against conventional armies.

The type of violence instigated in the 1970s–1980s by (nearly) fully clandestine organizations such as ETA in Spain, the Red Brigades in Italy, the RAF in Germany, or the Provisional IRA in the UK also has distinctly modern features. This point is generally recognized by terrorism experts. They have been eager to highlight how contemporary technological developments (miniaturization, etc.), and the global reach by the international media, make disruptive forms of violence less costly and more rewarding. The transnationalization and networking of groups such as Al-Qaeda are also often highlighted. The modernity of such organizations however also must be analyzed against the backdrop of more structural factors affecting political organizations. Three interrelated elements are of interest from a historical sociological perspective.

The first concerns clandestinity. Systematic clandestinity becomes a necessity once national territories are controlled homogenously by Weberian states (Sinno 2011). Secret groups have obviously existed well before the modern state, but generally these were only very contextually secret (in certain cities or areas) or were secret in relation to a dominant religion. Armed groups that operate clandestinely over large territories are quite specific to the modern state. It is not for nothing that “terrorism” is often defined as an urban form of guerrilla. In states that are infrastructurally weak and poorly urbanized, armed groups are generally able to come out of clandestinity in sparsely populated rural areas: they develop into guerrilla movements. Reversely, fully clandestine “terrorist organizations” develop in urbanized and/or infrastructurally strong states. In the “AfPak” region, the Taliban guerrilla’s heartland is in rural Afghanistan, while the fully clandestine (and “terrorist”) Al-Qaeda central is rather based in big Pakistani cities.

The second concerns “terrorism” seen as a “weapon of the weak” targeting civilians to challenge official political authorities. The impact of this indirect strategy toward political authorities is linked to the claim on the part the latter to protect their population. This is a specific modern claim that Foucault locates toward the end of the eighteenth century when governments take over the “pastoral power” of the church and shoulder responsibility for the well-being of their population (Foucault 2003). It is only when the “security” of the population becomes an explicit mission of the state that the random killing of civilians becomes an efficient means of challenging political authorities. It is not for nothing that the Zealot-Sicarii or the

Author's Proof
Assassin Order targeted influential political and religious leaders rather than random civilians (Rapoport 1984).

The third element concerns spectacular violence. A. Tocqueville has highlighted a peculiar phenomenon: the more the formal egalitarianism of political modernity becomes pervasive, the more the subjective feeling of the ever present of inequality grows (Tocqueville 2002). The same can be said of violence. The lesser the physical violence is part of the everyday experience of ordinary people, the more the sudden eruption of violence in everyday situations inspires “shock and awe.” Consequently, asymmetric violence against civilians is all the more rewarding as societies are domestically pacified. The political impact of the rarely lethal attacks of the PIRA in the UK has hence to be put in the context of the long-term decline of interpersonal violence highlighted by historians of violence (Muchembled 2012).

In order to highlight some of the debates on clandestine political violence in sociology, this chapter will focus on four issues.

The first deals with the question of the instrumental or expressive nature of this violence. Two main perspectives can be distinguished. According to the first, often inspired by Weber or rational choice theory, political movements or organizations deploy political violence instrumentally, as part of their wider effort to mobilize their support base, challenge the incumbents, and maintain control compliance (Tilly 2004; Kalyvas 1999; Oberschall 2004; Malešević 2019). According to the second, more neo-Durkheimian perspective, this form of violence arises in response to social anomy. Violence here serves to express a sense of belonging to an imaginary community. Rather than being instrumental, clandestine political violence is largely used for its immediate “consummatory rewards” linked to its ability to make an identity claim and to reverse the stigma of political exclusion (Wieviorka 2009; Alexander 2011).

The notion of expressive violence is however confusing. Violence, used as a mode of expression and political communication, does not contradict the notion of instrumentality. The two dimensions come together in the notion of “propaganda of the deed” used by revolutionary anarchist groups in the nineteenth century. Violence is a propaganda tool used to mobilize and galvanize the masses. Indeed, when targeting incumbent authorities, it highlights their weaknesses and exposes their repressive nature should they respond indiscriminately. When targeting civilians, it might be part of a conflict strategy of polarization. It seeks to activate boundaries between social groups, for example, by inviting retaliation on the part of the targeted group. While war involves the use of organized violence between political units, clandestine organization rather uses violence to become political units able to engage in war.

The possibilities of using violence to convey a message are in fact diverse. The political communication might be destined to out-group (distant enemies or allies) or in-group (intimate enemies or the support base) audiences. The violence itself might primarily target this audience or the presumed enemy of this audience. When combining these two dimensions, four types of clandestine political violence can be distinguished. They are called here, respectively, rule by intimidation, strategy of polarization, proactive guerrilla, and courting foreign assistance.
A second debate concerns the causes that lead individuals to join clandestine armed groups. According to a first approach, poverty plays a central role in triggering political violence (Falk et al. 2011). No statistics have however corroborated this claim, and existing studies rather show that people from educated middle classes are overrepresented. A second approach rather points at the role of education in fuelling social aspirations contradicted by limited perspectives of social promotion (Sageman 2004). A third approach focuses on the role of networks of micro-solidarity in the recruitment of activists. Members of clandestine armed groups indeed tend to be recruited by people whom they know closely from other social activities or through family relations (Porta 1988, 2013; Bosi and Porta 2012).

A third question concerns the nature of clandestine groups. Scholars using the framework of contentious politics and social mobilization highlight that clandestine groups emerge (and break way) from wider political movements that use a variety of mostly nonviolent repertoires of action. In this context, “radicalization” occurs as a result of multiple interactions involving policing, competition between divergent groups of the political movement, and the progressive insulation of a network of increasingly radicalized individuals (Porta 1988, 2013). On the contrary, scholars from political science and Weberian sociologists rather tend to focus on the role of hierarchical and bureaucratized clandestine armed organizations in maintaining internal cohesion in the face of state repression and recruiting preexisting networks in order to commit acts of violence (Hassan 2014). These organizations might benefit from (outside) state support or from defectors from states bureaucracies (Sinno 2011; Weinstein 2006; Staniland 2014; Malešević 2017, 2019).

Fourthly, a frequent question concerns the role of religion. While it is common to refer to “religious terrorism,” the question is what exact role religious ideologies play. According to some authors, rigoristic religious ideologies serve to shore up combat motivation in asymmetrical conflicts (Kalyvas and Balcells 2010). Others show that it serves a strategy of strategic signaling by which armed groups convey their commitment in situations characterized by high degrees of uncertainty as to the combat motivation of diverse groups (Walter 2017). A third approach highlights how “religious extremism” emerges from strategic outbidding between rival oppositional groups in countries in which ideological offer is severely restrained by political authorities (Toft 2007).

The study of the Afghan civil war in the 1980s and 1990s, from which groups as Al-Qaeda and the Taliban emerged, however reveals an alternative explanation. In Afghanistan, political networks in the countryside (often around influential Khans) tend to be strong but at the same time parochial. On the contrary, the logistical
networks of religious leaders diffuse yet span huge distances: they are nationwide or even transnational. This is linked to the role of madrassas (irrespective of their ideological orientation) in the structuration of long-distance solidarities between students from widely diverse localities.

As a result, any broad armed mobilization initiated by local political leaders tends to fragment geographically and lead to in-fighting between localities. Armed organizations structured by networks of “students in religion” infrastructurally more robust for reasons that have not much to do with religious beliefs but everything to do with the logic of recruitment of religious schooling (Dorronsoro 2005). While the Afghan uprising in 1979 hence began with widely inefficient local groups, the more efficient organizations were the ones able to co-opt religious networks all over Afghanistan and connect them to parties outside of the country (Rubin 2002).

One of the peculiarities of the literature clandestine political violence is that it more often deals with its micro-foundations than with macrostructures. This linked to a moral or legal focus on criminal intent and a practical concern for individual rehabilitation. Part of this literature deals with the psychological profile (and mental health) of identity-seeking political activists. Most authors however agree that individuals joining clandestine armed groups generally are not any different from other members of their societies. More sociological-oriented authors such as Porta and Bosi however focus on the role of closed networks; some would call them primary group associations, in the recruitment into clandestine groups (Porta 1988; Bosi and Porta 2012). This is less the result of choice than of a permanent fear of infiltration by government services. By giving priority to people, such as school friends, former colleagues, or family members, the recruiter knows closely the risk of compromising the organization’s security is reduced. This is even more the case as the progressive and collective nature of “radicalization” that the recruits generally come from wider and more open political movements and progressively are channeled into clandestine organizations. Although the overexposed phenomenon of “self-radicalization” on the Internet exists, it rarely gives direct access to the organization without prior proof of allegiance.

Closed recruitment and a systematic suspicion encouraging militants to cut preexisting social ties ensure organizational closure and strong emotional bonds between militants. While this process of encapsulation favors ideological orthodoxy and interpersonal solidarity, it also favors groupthink and can lead the organization to lose ground with the wider movements of potential sympathizers. Violence sometimes seeks to restore this missing organic link to wider audiences, often without significant success as highlighted by the RAF. More successful organizations however combine clandestine armed branches with more open front organizations (Berti 2013). The latter allow the organization to remain open to sympathizers or occasional supporters. The former guarantee operational security as well as military efficiency. Organizations like Hezbollah are known, in their recruitment policy, to staff their military units following geographical location. This means that preexisting networks of micro-solidarity based on place of residence, clan, and family are directly recruited into its military organization, a fact that contributes to its units’ efficiency in combat.
Revolutions

While wars, genocides, and clandestine political violence largely remained on the margins of historical sociological research, the same thing cannot be said about revolutions. In fact, both classical and contemporary historical sociologists have devoted a great deal of scholarly attention to the study of revolutions. For example, Marx and Weber have written extensively about the revolutionary upheavals of their time and have also explored revolutions in a comparative historical sense. Marx is today better known for his programmatic theory that envisages and advocates the proletarian revolution with the working class successfully overthrowing the bourgeoisie, as depicted in the Communist Manifesto: “Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains” (Marx and Engels 2005[1848]: 89). Nevertheless, in his more sociological work, he analyzed the social dynamics of 1848 revolutions in Germany, France, Italy, and Austria as well as the legacy of the 1871 Paris Commune. In the “Civil War in France” (1871) and other writings on the Paris Commune, Marx reassessed his earlier views of revolutionary action arguing that the tragic defeat of the Paris uprising indicated that violence is central to revolution and that proletariat cannot use the same coercive methods of the bourgeoisie: “the working class cannot simply lay hold of ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes.”

Weber also studied revolutions as they unfolded. His focus was primarily on the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917. He learned Russian to study the revolutionary situation and has written several essays that link the Bolshevik seizure of power to his theories of bureaucracy and rationalization. For Weber, revolution was an illegitimate usurpation of authority that transpires in the context of state breakdown. He explained the revolutionary outcome through the prism of geopolitical forces (i.e., defeat in war), disagreements between political and military elites, and the mobilization of interest groups that have been excluded from power. He emphasized the role of military power which in 1905 was severely paralyzed: “if even a tenth of the officer corps and the troops remain at the disposal of the government...then any number of rebels would be powerless against them” (Weber in Collins 2001:186). By 1917, the war was lost by Russia after heavy casualties which severely delegitimized the old order and contributed to elite polarization, an unwillingness on the part of the military to intervene in support of the government and society-wide dissatisfaction. Weber successfully predicted that Bolshevik victory would bring about bureaucratic dictatorship that would establish a monopoly of party officials instead of the promised “dictatorship of the proletariat.”

While the classics of historical sociology have made initial steps toward understanding the revolutionary processes, the first full-fledged theories of revolution emerged in the late 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Barrington Moore and Theda Skocpol developed a novel structuralist model of historical change where revolution was identified as the key catalyst of social transformation. For Moore (1966, 1978), revolutionary violence played a decisive role in the birth of modernity. Nevertheless, unlike the conventional interpretations which associated modernity solely with the liberalism of the French and American revolutions, Moore (1966) demonstrated
convincingly that both state socialism and fascism were also modern projects built on top of distinct revolutionary experiences. He contrasted the “three routes to the modern world” arguing that the presence of a strong bourgeoisie was a precondition for the development of liberal democracy. Thus, whereas the bourgeoisie prevented the dominance of the aristocracy in England, France, and the USA, the revolutionary experiences of Russia, China, Japan, and Germany were very different as the weakness of the bourgeoisie forced coalitions with the aristocracy or peasants, respectively. These coalitions ultimately brought about communism or fascism.

Skocpol continued this line of argument but focused more on the power of the state. In her comparative historical analysis of the French, Russian, and Chinese revolutions, Skocpol (1979) identified two primary causes of revolutionary upheavals: the weakened state apparatus and the continuous presence of social discontent. However, in her interpretation, revolutionary agents play only a secondary role, while the revolutions are more likely to happen when the profound political crisis, war defeats, natural disasters, or poor economy generate elite polarization and the state authorities are unable to raise taxes and control the social order. In Skocpol’s view, political revolutions do not necessarily transform into social revolutions – while the former relates only to the takeover of the state institutions, the latter is also associated with a profound change in class structure. The French, Russian, and Chinese revolutions were social revolutions par excellence as all three involved the social and political ascent of the new, class-based, ruling groups.

Structuralist theories of revolution reached their pinnacle with the contributions of Tilly (1978, 1995), Goldstone (1991), and Goodwin (2001). These approaches followed in the footsteps of Moore and Skocpol as they too emphasized the centrality of state power in revolutions. However, these authors shifted the focus from class to geopolitics and social movements. Tilly and Goodwin argue that revolutions are not only caused by internal factors such as elite disunity, economic collapse, or fiscal incapacity on the part of the state but also by external factors such as changing geopolitical contexts including protracted warfare, political pressures from powerful states, and global socioeconomic downturns. Goodwin (2001) also identifies political oppression and state violence as factors that can foster political mobilization of dissent. For Tilly (1995) geopolitical context is often linked with internal politics as domestic social movements that challenge the state are often influenced and supported by external groups. The weakening of the state apparatus combined with the strengthening organizational capacity of the social movements can generate revolutionary situations, but only a small number of such situations result in revolutionary outcomes. In addition to these internal and external processes, Goldstone (1991, 2014) also singles out the role of demography and in particular intense population growth which can strain a state’s ability to provide resources and, in this way, delegitimize the ruling strata. For example, the revolutions that transpired during the Arab Spring were in part fuelled by the demographic explosion and the dissatisfaction of young educated groups who experienced substantial downward mobility.

More recent research on revolutions have been critical of the structuralist perspectives. Hence, Selbin (2010), Lane (2009), and Foran (2005) among others insist
that structuralism overemphasizes the role of the state and geopolitics while neglecting the role of agency and civil society in fermenting revolutionary situations. Moreover, these new approaches argue that revolutions are not generated by economic and political processes alone but that revolutionary events are predominantly shaped by cultural and ideological factors that mobilize various groups within civil society. Foran (2005) and Lane (2009) understand revolutions through the prism of collective action mobilized through specific interpretative frames. Drawing on their research on the 1989–1991 revolutions that brought down state socialism and more recent work on the color revolutions of the early 2000s, Foran and Lane point out that these revolutions took place in settled geopolitical conditions and stable state structures where there was no pronounced elite polarization. Furthermore, these revolutions were largely peaceful and were spearheaded by ad hoc civil society groups rather than by established revolutionaries and social movements. Lane and Foran argue that material and political factors were of secondary importance in the rhetoric of the protesters and that the emphasis was on shared cultural idioms and collective memories and symbols. Selbin (2010:78) develops this approach further by arguing that revolutions cannot happen without believable narratives of change: “stories are the reason why revolutions are made...without them, there is no resistance, no rebellion, no revolution.” In his influential book, Selbin differentiates between four types of revolutionary narratives: (1) the stories of civilization and democratization that underpin the foundational myths of liberal democracies; (2) the narratives centered on questions of social justice, poverty, and inequality; (3) the narratives of national liberation and anti-colonial struggles; and (4) the tragic stories of failed uprisings. In his view, many revolutions draw upon several of these narratives to justify and mobilize public support.

This cultural turn in the study of revolutions has been balanced by other new perspectives which aim to go beyond structuralism and culturalism. Hence, Lawson (2016, 2019) develops a relational approach which shows that revolutions are not standardized phenomena with stable and immutable features but are highly contingent, erratic, and historically framed “entities in motion.” This approach moves away from the conventional, mostly essentialist and substantialist, views and advocates a process-oriented analysis that views revolutions as intersocietal phenomena shaped by external geopolitical forces, internal politics, social inequalities, and status disparities. Nevertheless, the objective inequities are unlikely to transform into revolutionary action until they become couched in the language of political injustice. In other words, for Lawson, economic inequality is rarely a direct cause of revolutionary upheavals: instead, asymmetry in the individual access to resources has to be articulated as a political exclusion to spur social mobilization. In a series of empirically meticulous studies, Wimmer (2013, 2018) also shows that political rather than economic exclusion, often combined with geopolitical pressure, has proven crucial in mobilizing large-scale unrests and uprisings. In this context, revolutions often transpire when authoritarian and patronimial regimes attempt to liberalize or democratize and, in the process, open the space for the voicing of political grievances. Mann (2013) also offers a comprehensive theory that goes beyond the structuralist and culturalist accounts. For Mann (1986:1–2), social order cannot be reduced to
singular factors such as economy or culture but. It is constituted and operates through the intersecting and overlapping of socio-spatial networks of power. In this context, he analyzes the interdependency of four principal sources of social power (economic, political, ideological, and military) and insists that “all four sources of social power provided necessary preconditions for revolution” (Mann 2013:247). For Mann (2013:246), revolution is a “popular insurgent movement that overthrows a ruling regime and then transforms substantially at least three of the four sources of social power.” Analyzing the history of the twentieth-century revolutions, Mann (2013:247) contends that authoritarian regimes that were defeated in wars and were divided by class struggle were more likely to experience revolutions (i.e., Russia, China, Korea, Vietnam, Cuba, Nicaragua, Laos, and Nepal) and that war “continued to determine form of the revolution itself.” Coercive power remains important for revolutionaries as they often have to contain the counterrevolutionary forces and in this context use violence to control populations. Since democracies allow for compromise and reform, they are less likely to experience revolutions (Mann 2013:266–7).

These new perspectives have pushed the debate forward recognizing the complexity and historical contingency of revolutionary processes. Nevertheless, what is still missing in these accounts is the analysis of the micro-dynamics of revolution. There is no doubt that revolutions are shaped by and dependent on large-scale macro-historical processes. Yet every revolution involves a distinct microworld: the actions of individuals and small groups that spearhead the uprisings, the people who resist the revolutions and those who join enthusiastically, as well as the numerous ordinary individuals who remain bystanders. The revolutionary experiences also create their own emotional dynamics as individuals forge new forms of group solidarity and new sense of identification. Revolutionary uprisings are often characterized by unpredictable events through which old rules, regulations, and systems of order are transgressed and suddenly replaced by new social realities. In this process, some individuals and groups lose their place in the social hierarchy, while others rapidly climb the social ladder. Thus, revolutions also involve a degree of strategic action as large-scale social change provides new opportunities for some individuals to improve their economic and political position.

If one focuses on revolutionary leaderships, it is clear that shared micro-realities have contributed significantly to revolutionary situations. Many nineteenth- and early twentieth-century revolutionary movements were fronted by clandestine revolutionary cells that were proscribed and persecuted by various governments. In this environment, they had to develop highly disciplined and hierarchical yet flexible and decentralized organizational structures to evade the police. Operating in secret and in hostile conditions meant that such clandestine cells had to rely on trust and loyalty of their members. Hence, such revolutionary units tended to develop a strong sense of micro-group attachment with heightened emotional bonds between members of the cell. Living separate from the mainstream society has also contributed to the idea that the revolutionaries are exceptional and ethically superior individuals who have a moral responsibility to enact a revolution or to eliminate those who are considered to be counterrevolutionaries (Malešević 2017:205–10). For example, the nineteenth-
century European revolutionary groups included variety of secret nationalist, communist, anarchist, and other clandestine groups. Some of these organizations were successful in bringing about revolutions or in contributing to revolutionary upheavals – the Young Italy, the Greek Society of Friends, or Turkish Committee of Union and Progress. The close emotional ties forged during the years of struggle between the members of revolutionary cells were later instrumental in political alliances that were formed in the postrevolutionary periods. Although the more recent revolutions rely less on clandestine movements, they also forge emotional and social ties between revolutionaries that are later used as a springboard for building strong political alliances and even new political parties. This has been the experience of the color revolutions on the early 2000s, the Tunisian Jasmine Spring of 2011, and the Ukrainian Euromaidan of 2014 (Lawson 2019; Foran 2005).

Nevertheless, revolutions cannot happen without the ordinary individuals, and it is crucial to explore the emotional dynamics of everyday reality of revolution. Many revolutionary events contain a degree of carnivalesque where ordinary individuals can suddenly transgress the established order. In this context, revolutionary situations give birth to temporary moments of collective effervescence where, as Durkheim was already well aware, individuals attain heightened emotional responses ranging from fear and angst to excitement and pride. With the onset of violence, revolutions forge new forms of solidarity as individuals experience heightened emotional valence – killing and dying become interwoven into the revolutionary narrative and as such create new emotionally infused ideological frames. In Collins’s (2004) interpretation, these situations of concentrated emotional interaction are building blocks of interaction ritual chains. These chains entail not only shared emotions but also physicality of interaction – it is no accident that the heightened emotional states involve rhythmic coordination of human bodies. For example, many revolutions have been defined by scenes of people gathering on the public squares and holding hands, hugging each other, or singing and dancing in unison.

By focusing on this microworld of revolutions, one can acquire a better understanding of the collective action and social meanings that transpire before, during, and after revolutionary events. Since revolutions often involve extraordinary acts of individuals who willingly sacrifice their lives for others or vigorously destroy other human beings, it is crucial to analytically penetrate this microworld. It is only by digging deep into this microcosm and by connecting it with the larger macro-historical structures that researchers will be able to explain the social and historical dynamics of revolutions.

### Genocides

The concept of genocide has traditionally been used as a legal category and has only recently become an object of sociological research. The term was coined by a Polish-Jewish lawyer, Raphael Lemkin, during the WWII, and he successfully campaigned for this concept and the crime of genocide to become enshrined in the UN as a General Assembly Resolution 260. Hence, the convention on the Prevention and
Punishment of the Crime of Genocide was adopted by the UN in 1948 and has been ratified by 152 states. However, the definition of genocide that was agreed at the UN did not reflect fully Lemkin’s original proposal. As the Soviet delegation objected to class and political ideology being incorporated into the list of categories associated with genocidal acts, the final definition was a political compromise (Üngör, 2012, 2016). Hence, Article 2 of the Convention states that genocide is an act “committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.” The following five types of activity are specified in the Convention: “Killing members of the group; Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; and Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group” (https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/genocide.shtml). This rather vague definition simultaneously excluded some social categories (i.e., class, gender, political affiliation, etc.) while also leaving the scale of destruction ambiguous. It is not clear what the intent to destroy in part means—a few individuals, a small village, a city, all male population, etc. Furthermore, the compromise definition reduced genocide to the physical and biological destruction of groups. Nevertheless, as Shaw (2007) rightly points out, Lemkin’s original understanding conceptualized genocide in wider terms as set of practices that go beyond the destruction of human bodies. In fact, the systematic killings associated with genocides are often only the last phase of the much broader ideological project: “The Nazis did not aim simply to kill subject peoples, even the Jews; they aimed to destroy their ways of life and social institutions...when physical destruction came...this was an extreme development of pre-existing Nazi policies of social destruction” (Shaw 2007:22).

These political influences have shaped the origins of the UN Genocide Convention, and the political motives continue to frame public debates on genocide. Since the Convention came into force in 1951, it has been used by numerous governments and political groups to make a claim that their groups have been victims of genocide. The vague wording of the definition has allowed proliferation of claims and counterclaims about one’s own victimhood and the unprecedented criminal behavior of one’s enemies. To be recognized as a group that has experienced genocide has become a parameter of greatest suffering. Moreover, attaining this label has also automatically linked the perpetrator nation with the ultimate crime.

This dominance of legal and political uses of the concept has prevented many social scientists from engaging with this type of organized violence. However, in the last few decades, historical sociologists have attempted to move away from these normative debates in order to develop more universalist and historically grounded theories of genocide. Instead of focusing on identifying the individual culprits of genocide, sociologists have shifted the emphasis on tracing the historical dynamics and social conditions that make genocides possible.

One of the key questions raised by historical sociological research is as follows: Are genocides modern or ancient phenomena? While much of legal and historiographic scholarship does not differentiate between the pre-modern and modern
forms of organized violence, many historical sociologists argue that genocide is not only a new concept but also a novel historical phenomenon that only arises under modern conditions. Hence, unlike Smith (1987:21) or Kuper (1981:9) who argue that “the word is new, the concept is ancient” or that “genocide has existed in all periods of history,” respectively, many sociologists insists genocide is distinctly a modern phenomenon.

Thus, Zygmunt Bauman in his pioneering *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989) argues that unlike the traditional pogroms and persecutions of Jews that have been present throughout history, the Holocaust was distinctly modern in its organization, technology, and ideology. While pre-modern forms of violence against Jews were sporadic, situational, and largely disorganized events, the Holocaust was systematic, ideologically articulated, well-planned, and a highly organized project. Unlike the previous instances of religious bigotry that periodically targeted the unprotected and visible religious minorities, the Holocaust was grounded in clearly articulated ideological blueprints. The Holocaust was underpinned by the engineering ambitions that aimed to create a new man and new world where there was no room for what the Nazis identified as the racially inferior others. In this sense, the notion of racial purity was not a throwback to a more primitive past but was in fact an idea developed within the heritage of Enlightenment. The classification of human beings into firmly demarcated racial groups associated with different biological, physical, and mental qualities, as constituted by the race science and eugenics, was not some relic from the barbarian past – it was a profoundly novel and modern way of understanding the social world. This thinking about difference was farmed and legitimized by and with the most advanced scientific theories of its time. Hence, the genocide of six million Jews and many other groups was not perpetuated in an ad hoc manner, and out of religious animosity or simple bigotry, this was a state-led and state-organized project that was pursued and prioritized until the very end of the Nazi state. For Bauman, the Holocaust was not just modern in terms of the ideological narratives that underpinned its realization. It was also distinctly modern in its organization and technology. This unparalleled genocide was implemented using the most advanced bureaucratic system, infrastructure, transport, and communications as well as the most sophisticated industrial and technological knowhow. The science, technology, and administration developed to operate modern manufacturing were deployed to run extermination camps and gas chambers. As Bauman (1989:8) emphasizes, the same factory model that produced commodities for everyday use was adopted for mass murder: “Rather than producing goods, the raw material was human beings and the end product was death, so many units per day marked carefully on the manager’s production charts. The chimneys, the very symbol of the modern factory system, poured forth acrid smoke produced by burning human flesh. The brilliantly organised railroad grid of modern Europe carried a new kind of raw material to the factories.”

Mark Levene (2005, 2013) develops a similar argument but widens his geographical and historical focus. In his view, genocides transpire in the specific historical context where several structural processes coalesce together: intensive state formation and expansion of its coercive power, ideological radicalization, and the onset of
protracted wars. In this approach, genocide is a product of modernity and the widespread aspirations to establish sovereign and culturally homogenous nation-states. Nevertheless, Levene also links the origins of genocide to the imperial expansions and argues that many colonial genocides including the Herero and Namaqua in South West Africa, Belgian Congo Free State, French conquest of Algeria, and genocide of native populations in Americas and Australia were inspired by similar ideological goals. He draws parallels between the mass killings of civilians by the French revolutionary army in Vendée and the genocides throughout the colonial possessions of European empires.

The most comprehensive recent modernist historical sociological theory of genocide was formulated by Michael Mann in his books *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (2005) and *Fascists* (2004). For Mann, murderous ethnic cleansing – his term for genocide – is a product of changing geopolitical conditions, often combined with intensified ideological rivalries. Genocides are typically associated with wars and as such are shaped by the changing dynamics of armed conflicts. In his view, genocide is rarely a premeditated and well-planned event but something that gradually develops in the environment of increased radicalization. In most cases, genocidal policy emerges in the context “where powerful groups within two ethnic groups aim at legitimate and achievable rival states, “in the name of the people” over the same territory, and the weaker is aided from outside.”

In Mann’s view, the stereotypical perceptions of genocide as something that only authoritarian or pre-modern states do are completely unfounded. On the contrary, he argues that neither authoritarian nor traditional polities (i.e., ancient empires, patriarchal kingdoms, or city-states) had interest or capacity to implement genocidal projects. The pre-modern polities were culturally heterogeneous but deeply hierarchical entities where difference was class-based, and as such they had no benefit from eliminating cultural minorities. The modern authoritarian states prefer stability over cultural uniformity and as such are unlikely to engage in genocidal politics which would inevitably bring about instability. The partial exception here might be the onset of war which can destabilize the state. In the *Dark Side of Democracy*, Mann advances the argument that genocide is more likely to happen in situations where authoritarian states embark on the process of democratization and liberalization. In other words, murderous ethnic cleansing is often a by-product of incomplete or unsuccessful democratization: the shift in political legitimacy toward the idea of popular sovereignty can bring about genocidal outcomes when the notion of people’s power is understood in ethnic rather than demotic sense. In Mann’s (2005:3) own words, “cleansing is a hazard of the age of democracy since amid multiethnicity the ideal of rule by the people began to intertwine the demos with the dominant ethnos, generating organic conceptions of the nation and the state that encouraged the cleansing of minorities.” Hence, Mann is not arguing that democratic states are more prone to genocide as his argument has sometimes been misinterpreted (i.e., Laitin, 2006). Instead he is adamant that “stabilized institutionalized democracies” are least likely to conduct genocides. Nevertheless, he also argues that a number of contemporary democratic states have a long history of colonial murderous cleansing and that the contemporary democratic stability has often been built on top
of previous instances of mass murder. In particular, Mann (2005:4) identifies settler
democracies as being particularly prone to genocidal actions: “The more settlers
controlled colonial institutions, the more murderous the cleansing. . . . It is the most
direct relationship I have found between democratic regimes and mass murder.”
However, what is common to all instances of murderous ethnic cleansing is that they
are modern phenomena that are framed by modern forms of political power. The
genocides transpire in environments of competing ideological and state-building
projects where the rulers embark on modernizing and nationalizing their polities. For
example, one of the first twentieth-century genocides, that of Armenian minority, did
not happen in a multiethnic, authoritarian, and pre-modern Ottoman Empire but in
modernizing, secularizing, and liberalizing new polity that will eventually become
the Turkish nation-state. The ideologues of the genocide that involved the murder
and expulsion of over 1.5 million people were not old imperial and authoritarian
sultans but secular and reformist liberal intellectuals who established and ran the
organization that masterminded the genocide in 1915 – the Committee of Union and
Progress.

Historical sociologists have also analyzed genocide as a form of warfare. Both
Shaw (2003, 2007) and Ugur Ümit Üngör (2012, 2016) explore the transformation
of genocide through the prism of interstate conflicts. For Shaw, genocide is an
illegitimate type of war that targets the enemy civilians rather than military organi-
izations. While civilians have historically experienced violence in wars, Shaw dem-
onstrates how in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries civilian populations have
gradually become principal foci of war projects. He argues that over the course of
human history, warfare has become more destructive and centered on civilians. He
terms these new types of conflicts as “degenerate wars” where civilians are rarely
distinguished from soldiers and where the question of the legitimate use of violence
is often blurred or not raised at all. For Shaw (2007), genocides are integral to wars
as they are organized by the state, utilize the coercive apparatus of the state
(i.e., military, police, intelligence services, etc.), and are executed almost exclusively
during war. Üngör (2016) also explores genocides through the context of warfare. He
argues that genocides are often a by-product of wars where new nationalizing states
focus on ethnic homogenization. In this context, genocide becomes a form of
“nationalist population policy” centered on transforming culturally heterogeneous
polities into ethnically homogeneous nation-states. In his analysis of Eastern Turkey
(1913–1950), he shows how the Young Turk ruler ethnically cleansed non-Turkish
populations in order to create an ethnically homogenous Turkish territory (Üngör
2012).

Perhaps even more than other forms of organized violence, genocides are macro-
level processes initiated and implemented by the state and other large-scale social
organizations. Nevertheless, the implementation of genocide is ultimately dependent
on the social dynamics of the microworld: the motivations of direct perpetuators, the
resistance of victims, the passivity of bystanders, and the changing interrelationships
between these groups and individuals. Although leading historical sociological
theories recognize the significance of agency in genocide, they do not explore
extensively the micro-dynamics of mass atrocities. For example, both Bauman and
Mann discuss the motivations of genocide organizers and perpetrators. Thus, Mann (2000) analyzes the “core Nazi constituencies” and the biographies of 1,581 people involved in the genocide. Bauman too dwells on the motivations of perpetrators and invokes the Milgram experiments on conformity to suggest that violence is linked to the obedience to authority. However, these analyses do not go beyond the identification of static categories attributed to the specific individuals or groups. Instead of tracing the social dynamics of the microworld and the changing social relations and individual actions, these analyses just point to categories of individuals that were more represented among the perpetrators – authoritarian personalities that were obedient to authority and prone to imitation (Bauman) or the young educated Volksdeutsche men with the longer career in the Nazi movement (Mann). Nevertheless, as has been argued previously to understand the changing dynamics of participation in genocide, it is crucial to explore the emotional and moral micro-order of genocidares (Malešević 2017). Instead of assuming that genocide perpetrators are natural born killers or suffer from mental illness, it is germane to trace the gradual transformation and radicalization of ordinary individuals. As Bartov (2018), Fulbrook (2012), and Browning (1992) among others show, most individuals who might initially be reluctant or even hostile to killing civilians can gradually become perpetrators, as the practices of killing become normalized and legitimized not only by the state authorities but also by their peers, friends, comrades, and family members. While genocidares are perceived by outsiders as ruthless and merciless killers, their own view of themselves is usually very different as it is firmly attached to the shared perceptions and actions of their own micro-groups. In other words, the genocide perpetrators inhabit a different moral and emotional micro-universe where their actions are self-justified in reference to their alleged protection of their own groups. For many genocidares, killing women and children was emotionally difficult but necessary as the enemy group was conceived to be a continuous threat to one’s group existence. This was clearly stated in Himmler infamous 1943 Poznan speech when he explains to his soldiers why they have to kill the Jewish children: “I did not consider myself justified to exterminate the men [only]...and allow the avengers of our sons and grandsons in the form of their children to grow up. The difficult decision had to be made to have this people disappear from the earth” (Smith and Peterson 1974:169). To fully understand how genocides happen, it is important to dissect these micro-sociological realities and link them to the broader organizational and ideological structures. Historical sociologists with their understanding of the long-term social and historical trends and awareness of the micro-dynamics of social action are best placed to provide comprehensive theories of genocide.
Conclusion

This chapter has scanned through the most important studies on organized violence in historical sociology. The stock has also been taken of the literature in the wider social sciences that is relevant from the point of view of a historical sociological approach to violence.

Although violence has traditionally not been a central preoccupation for sociologists, historical sociology has come a long way since the 1980s in filling the gap. It has allowed identifying long-term trends, such as the role of the growth of infrastructural power in increasing the potential for mass violence (Malešević 2018). Contemporary forms of violence are generally the outcome of such long-term trends. Caution is consequently warranted when contemporary forms of violence are claimed to flow from radically new conditions. Historical sociology also sheds light on the distinctly modern features of contemporary forms of genocide, clandestine political violence, and war. Notions of a timeless human proclivity toward brutality, so often used to explain violent events, are hence equally questionable (Malešević 2010a).

A lot however remains to be done. Three avenues of future research have here been identified. Firstly, the state-centricity of many seminal works in historical sociology sometimes seems at odds with the ever presence of “non-state violence” today. The issue is however here less to “throw out the state” (after having “brought it back in”), as it is to broaden the picture: historical processes like bureaucratization affect organizations other than the state, be it non-state armed groups or private military companies; and the latter develop in close interaction with states. Most importantly, due consideration for state organizations does not warrant methodological nationalism: as highlighted by historical sociologists, states are the contingent products of long-distance interactions and relations (Mann 1986). In this sense, the transnationalization of organized violence, rather than challenging historical sociology, seems to vindicate some of its initial intuitions.

Secondly, the focus of historical sociology has, in line with its structuralist inspirations, been on material conditions of possibility of organized violence. There has been relatively less interest in explaining the situational logic of particular violent events. What processes accompany the actualization and effectuation of organized violence? This dimension, the one of the microworld of violence, is of increasing interest in sociology (Collins 2008). It supposes to understand the unfolding of violence as lived experience, including its bodily practices, emotional dynamics, and social meaning. Integrating this dimension into historical sociology allows for a more complex analysis of social organizations, one that leaves more place for bottom-up logics and agency.

Thirdly, Eurocentrism has always been a problem in the social sciences. In the case of the historical sociology of organized violence, it can however find a partial justification in the violence projected from the “West” throughout the world from colonization onward. The prevalence of armed conflicts in the Global South cannot be analyzed independently from the latter’s position in a world order largely shaped by the “West” (Ayoob 1995). At the same time, it is important not to underestimate
geographical variations or to overstate the exceptionalism or influence of the “West.” The challenge is hence how to apply the tools of historical sociology beyond the West without necessarily taking the latter’s historical trajectory as point of reference. Many recent works have successfully met this challenge, thus taking historical sociology in new and challenging directions (Barkawi 2017).

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